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KATHARINE BRESHKOVSKY



FOR RUSSIA'S FREEDOM

By ERNEST POOLE

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1905



KATHARINE BRESHKOVSKY.

"Now in a few months they will rise by millions." A deep musical voice spoke in Russian—quietly. "We shall sweep away the System of the Czar, and Russia will be free. See—" She showed me bulletins that had followed her to New York. "Day and night they work. In place of sleep, a dream of freedom; in place of warmth and food and drink, the same dream. This dream is old in American breasts."

Her hair, once cut in prison, has grown again. A great wavy mass of gray frames a face broad, heavy, deep-lined with suffering. Her eyes, deep under high-arched brows, now flash the fires of her dream, now beam forth the warm affections of one whom hundreds call endearingly "Babushka"—little grandmother. Her voice, as she spoke through our interpreter, ran swiftly over her own sufferings, but rose passionately describing her country's degradation. Daughter of a nobleman and earnest philanthropist; then revolutionist, hard labor convict and exile for 23 years in Siberia; and now a heroic old woman of 61, she has plunged again into the dangerous struggle for freedom. The Russian Revolutionary Movement is embodied in this one heroic figure.

"More than fifty years ago," she began, "Russia lay asleep. The peasants, starved, bowed low and

staggering, broke out only here and there to burn an estate or butcher a landlord, to be flogged back into submission or death. So deep was their subservience that when, a wee girl of ten, I used to tell how I hated the bad flogging government, my old peasant nurse would beg me to whisper.

“My mother was deeply religious. Ignoring the false poms of the Greek Church, she tried only to impress on her children the ethical teachings of Christ. The incongruity between those teachings and our life soon bewildered me. My mother told me to treat the servants as brothers and sisters, but when she found me chatting in the great kitchen, she sternly told me that I must not forget my place as a nobleman's daughter. She taught me Christ's command to give away all that I had and follow him, but when the next morning I went out and gave my handsome little cloak to a shivering peasant child, again she sharply reproved me. I had long spells of thinking.

“My father helped me think. He was a man of broad, liberal ideas. We read together many books of science and travel. Social science absorbed me. By sixteen I had read much of Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot and I knew by heart the French Revolution. I was not confined to Russian, for I spoke French from babyhood, my German governess soon taught me German; and at that time the world's best thought was not garbled by Russian censorship. So trained I could hardly be called an ignorant fanatic.

“Fired by such ideas, I saw the poor, degraded slaves around me, and longed to see them free. At first I believed that freedom could be reached through the government. No revolutionary spirit had yet been kindled. It was the first great era of the Liberalists. The abolition of serfdom was soon to be effected; so too the trial by jury; and these promised reforms sent a social impulse sweeping through Russia. I was thrilled by the glad news; I read of thousands going to the peasants as doctors, school teachers and nurses; I read of agricultural schools opened and of model farms layed out; all teaching the peasant to be free. Filled with young enthusiasm I opened a little school near our estate.

“I found the peasant an abject, ignorant creature who grasped not even the meagre rights he already had. He could think only of his mud hut and his plot of ground. As for government, he knew only that in peace he must pay money; in war, lives. The new rumors had kindled his old heart-deep hope of freedom. The twenty peasants in my school, like the fifty millions in Russia, suspected that the proclamation had been hidden, and often went to the land owners demanding their freedom. At last the manifesto arrived.

“The peasant was free. No longer bound to the land, his land lord ordered him off. He was shown a little strip of the poorest soil, there to be free and starve. He was bewildered; he could not imagine himself without his old plot of land. For centuries

past, an estate had always been described as containing so many 'souls'. It was sold for so much per 'soul.' The 'soul' and the plot had always gone together. So the peasant had thought that his soul and his plot would be together freed. In dull but growing rage he refused to leave his plot for the wretched strip. 'Masters,' he cried, 'how can I nourish my little ones through a Russian winter? Such land means death.' This cry rose all over Russia.

"The Government appointed in every district an 'arbiter' to persuade the peasants. The arbiter failed. Then troops were quartered in their huts, homes were starved, old people were beaten by drunkards, daughters were raped. The peasants grew more wild, and then began the flogging. In a village near ours, where they refused to leave their plots, they were driven into line on the village street; every tenth man was called out and flogged with the knout; some died. Two weeks later, as they still held out, every fifth man was flogged. The poor ignorant creatures still held desperately to what they thought their rights; again the line, and now every man was dragged forward to the flogging. This process lasted five years all over Russia, until at last, bleeding and exhausted, the peasants gave in.

"I heard heartrending stories in my little school house, and many more through my father, the arbiter of our district. The peasants thronged to our house day and night. Many were carried in crippled by

the knout; sobbing wives told of husbands killed before their eyes. Often the poor wretches literally wallowed, clasping my father's knees, begging him to read again the manifesto and find it was a mistake, beseeching him to search for help in that mysterious region—the law court. From such interviews he came to me worn and haggard.

“I now saw how ineffectual were my attempts; I felt that tremendous economic and political changes must be made; but still a Liberalist, I thought only of reform. To seek guidance, to find what older heads were thinking, I went at nineteen with my mother and sister to St. Petersburg. Into our compartment on the train came a handsome young prince returning from official duties in Siberia. For hours he discussed with me the problems that were rushing upon us. His words thrilled like fire. Our excited voices rose steadily higher, until my mother begged me, as my nurse had done before, to speak low. The young prince is now an old man in exile. His name is Peter Kropotkin.

“In St. Petersburg I entered the central group of Liberalists, men and women of noble birth and university training; doctors, lawyers, journalists, novelists, poets, scientists, the most highly educated people in Russia. Since higher education for women was strictly forbidden, they had already become criminals by opening classes for women in the natural and political sciences. All these classes I eagerly joined, constantly attending their secret meetings.

Again my mother grew frightened, and at last she took me home. During the next three years, however, I returned again and again, traveled to other cities, and met Liberal people all over Russia.

“Then my father called me home. Here I resolved to support myself and help the peasants. My father built me a small boarding school for girls, and through the influence of my relatives I received many pupils. He built too a cottage in which I could teach the peasants. I now drew closer to them. I began to realize the dull memory every peasant has of flogging and toil from time immemorial. I felt their subconscious but heart-deep longing for freedom.

“Three years later I married a liberal, broad-minded land-owner who took deep interest in the zemstvo, our district moot. He established for me a peasants’ agricultural school. Several of the younger land owners became interested in our work. We met together frequently, and this was my last attempt at Liberalist reform.

“It is a poor patriot that will not thoroughly try his Government before he rises against it. We searched the laws and edicts; we found certain scant and long-neglected peasants’ rights of local suffrage; and then we began showing the peasants how to use these rights they already had. They crowded to the local elections and began electing as judges, arbiters and other officials, the Liberals who honestly held the peasants’ interests at heart. But when the more despotic landowners were ousted from the

zemstvo and lost their source of (to use your language) 'graft,' their leader denounced us to the Minister of the Interior as a band of conspirators. Several of us were exiled to Siberia; my husband and I were put under police surveillance, and my father was deposed from office without trial, as a 'dangerous man' for allowing such criminals to be at large. Punished as criminals for teaching the peasant his legal rights, we saw the Government as it was, the System of Corruption, watching jealously through spies and secret police that their peasant victim might not be taught anything that could make him to think or act as a man.

"A startling event now occurred. A Liberalist named Netchayev had already collected a revolutionary group. Discovered and arrested, their trial in 1871 was the first great event in the long struggle for freedom. Along the Great Siberian Road the procession of politicals began. Meanwhile their revolutionary documents had been published. Never again has the Government allowed this blunder. Those documents were read by thousands of Liberals like us. The spirit of revolution was kindled.

"I was at this time 26 years old. My husband like me had a whole life before him, and therefore I thought it only fair to speak frankly. I asked him if he were willing to suffer exile or death in this cause of freedom. He said that he was not. Then I left him.

"I went to Kief, joined a revolutionary group,

and traveled from town to town, spreading our ideas among the Liberals, both Jews and Russians. As our numbers swelled we resolved to reach the peasants themselves. We divided into two groups, the Lavrists, who believed in slowly educating the peasants to revolution; the Bacuninites, who believed in calling on the peasants to rise for freedom at once. To the Bacuninites I belonged, as did most of those who had lived close to the peasants.

“We put on peasant dress, to elude the police and break down the peasants’ cringing distrust. I dressed in enormous bark shoes, coarse shirt and drawers, and heavy cloak. I used acid on my face and hands; I worked and ate with the peasants; I learned their speech; I traveled on foot, forging passports; I lived ‘illegally.’

“By night I did my organizing. You desire a picture? A low room with mud floor and walls. Rafters just over your head, and still higher, thatch. The room was packed with men, women and children. Two big fellows sat up on the high brick stove, with their dangling feet knocking occasional applause. These people had been gathered by my host, a brave peasant whom I picked out, and he in turn had chosen only those whom Siberia could not terrify. I now recalled their floggings; I pointed to those who were crippled for life; to women whose husbands died under the lash; and when I asked if men were to be forever flogged, then they would cry out so fiercely that the three or four cattle in the next room would

bellow and have to be quieted. Again I would ask what chances their babies had of living, and in reply some peasant woman would tell how her baby had died the winter before. Why? I asked. Because they had only the most wretched strips of land. To be free and live the people must own the land! From my cloak I would bring a book of fables written to teach our principles and stir the love of freedom. And then far into the night, the fire light showed a circle of great, broad faces and dilated eyes, staring with all the reverence every peasant has for that mysterious thing—a book.

“These books, twice as effective as oral work, were printed in secrecy at heavy expense. But many of us had libraries, jewels, costly gowns and furs to sell; and new recruits kept adding to our fund. We had no personal expenses.

“Often, betrayed by some peasant spy, I left a village quickly, before completing my work. Then the hut group was left to meet under a peasant who could read aloud those wonderful fables. So they dreamed, until a few weeks later another leader in disguise came to them.

“In that year of 1874, over two thousand educated people traveled among the peasants. Weary work, you say. Yes, when the peasants were slow and dull, and the spirit of freedom seemed an illusion. But when that spirit grew real one felt far from weary. Then, too, we had occasional grippings of hands with comrades. We could always encourage each other,

for all had found the peasants eager; to own the land had been the dream of their fathers; their eagerness rose; and stout words of cheer were sent from one group to another. An underground system was started, a correspondence cypher was invented, the movement spread through 36 great provinces of Russia and became steadily better organized. So the People's Party was established.

"The System, alarmed by their spies, made wholesale arrests. I was under a peasant's name in Podolia. In my wallet was our manifesto, also maps showing the places already reached and those next to be organized. A servant girl spied them and told the servant of the local police agent. An hour later he came rushing in, and jerked the manifesto from my wallet. His eyes popping with excitement, he read the paper in a loud, thick voice. As that simple but stirring proclamation of freedom, equality and love was read, the poor, ignorant people thought it the longed for proclamation from the Czar. The news spread. Men, women and children rushed up. The District Attorney came and he too read it aloud. Then suddenly the chief of police arrived, glanced at the wild, joyous faces around, and seized the document. 'What is this?' he asked me roughly. 'Propaganda,' I replied, 'with which the attorney and the gendarme have been very viciously inciting the people.'

"In jail I was led down to the 'Black Hole.' As I came down two besotted wretches were stumbling

up. I was pushed in, the heavy door slammed, and bolts rattled in total darkness. At once I was sickened by the odor. I took a step forward and slipped, for the floor was soft with excrement. I stood still until deadly sick I sank down on a pile of straw and rags. A minute later I was stung sharply back to consciousness and sprang up covered with vermin. I leaned against the walls and found them damp. So I stood up all night in the middle of the hole. And this was the beginning of Siberia.

"I awaited trial in a new St. Petersburg prison. My cell was 9 feet long, 5 feet wide and 7 feet high. It was clean, and a hole above gave plenty of air. My bed was an iron bracket with mattress and pillow of straw, rough gray blanket, coarse sheet and pillow case. I wore my own clothes. This cell I never left for over two years.

"In solitary confinement? No. I joined a social club.

"On that first evening I lay in the dark telling myself that our struggle must go on in spite of this calamity, and yet fearful for it as we fear for things we love. I lay motionless, and solitary confinement began to work on my mind, as the System had planned it should. Suddenly I sat up quickly. I could hear nothing, but as I started to lie down, my ear approached again the iron pipe supporting my cot. Tick, tick, tickity, tick, tick. I felt along the pipe and found that it went through to the next cell. Again I heard. Tick, tick, tick, tickity, tick. I had

once heard a code planned at a meeting in Moscow, but I could not recall it. At last I had an idea. There are thirty-five letters in the Russian alphabet . I rapped. Once! Then twice! Then three times! So on until for the last letter I rapped thirty-five. No response. Again, slowly and distinctly. My heart was beating now. Steps came slowly down the corridor. The guard approached and passed my door. His steps died away. Suddenly—Tick!—Tick, tick!—Tick, tick, tick!—and through to thirty-five. Then slowly we spelled out words, and by this clumsy code the swifter code was taught me. After that for three years the pipe was almost always talking. How fast we talked! The Pipe sounded so—”

Her gray head bent over the table, her face was flushed, her eyes flashed back through forty years of danger and prison, and her strong, subtle fingers rolled out the ticks at lightning speed.

“Our Club had over a hundred members in solitary confinement; some in cells on either side of mine, some below and some above. Did we tell stories? Yes, and good ones! Young students—keen wits—high spirits!” She laughed merrily, becoming Babushka. “How some of those youngsters made love! A mere boy, two cells to my right, vowed he adored the young girl of nineteen five cells to my left on the floor above, whom he had never laid eyes on. I helped tick his gallant speeches and her responses continually along. They passed to the cell below hers, and were ticked up the heating pipe to

her by a sad little woman who grieved for her babies. Did they ever meet? Ah, Siberia is large as your States and France and England and Germany all together.

“Our Club was not all a club of pleasure. Some died of consumption; others killed themselves, and others went insane. The pipe raved sometimes. It spoke many sad good-byes to wives and children. But the pipe was not often so, for a Revolutionist must smile though the heart be torn. We older ones continually urged the young girls to be strong, for they told us how they were taken out and brutally treated to make them give evidence. A very few broke down, but there were many young girls who endured, unshaken, months of this brutality.

“From new prisoners we heard cheering news. The fire of our Idea had spread among workmen as well as peasants; in the factories many were arrested; some were imprisoned here and joined our Club; but were soon condemned into exile. Still the Idea spread. In 1877 came that tremendous demonstration on the Kazan Square in St. Petersburg. Hundreds were imprisoned; again many joined our Club and were condemned, sent us last words of cheer along the pipe, and so were rushed off to Siberia.

“In 1878 we were tried. One hundred had died or gone insane. We one hundred and ninety-three were packed into a little hall. Over half had belonged to our Club, and I had a strange shock as I now looked

at these clubmates with whom I had daily talked. White, thin and crippled, but still the same stout hearts. We nerved each other to refuse to be tried, for the trial we knew was to be a farce, with a special jury of only seven, of whom but one was a peasant, and with judges appointed by the Czar. They divided us into groups of ten or fifteen; the trials lasted half a year. When my turn came I protested against this farce, for this I was at once taken out and my prison term was lengthened to five years as hard labor convict in the mines. This is the punishment given to a murderer. My term served, I was a Siberian exile for life.

“Secretly at night, to avoid a demonstration, ten of us were led out. Other tens followed on successive nights. In the street below were eleven ‘telegas’—heavy hooded vehicles with three horses each. Into one I was placed, a stout gendarme squeezed in on each side, to remain there two months. Just before my knees sat the driver. We went off at a gallop, and our 5,000 mile journey began. The Great Siberian Road was feelingly described by Mr. Kennan. A succession of bumps of all sizes; our springless telegas jolted and bounced; my two big gendarmes lurched; our horses continually galloped for they were changed every few hours; we bounced often a whole week without stopping over ten minutes day or night; we suffered that peculiar agony that comes from long lack of sleep. Our officer ordered the gendarmes never to leave us. At times we women

held shawls between the gendarmes and our friends. Three wives who had come to share their husbands' exile were treated the same. We were all dressed in convict clothes. The men had also heavy chains on feet and wrists; their heads were partly shaved. Our officer kept the money given him by our anxious friends at home, and gave us each the government allowance of four and one-half cents a day. For sleep, we were placed in the etapes (wayside prisons). Mr. Kennan has well described the cells—reeking, crawling, infected with scurvy, consumption and typhoid. They had log walls roughly covered with plaster, often red from vermin killed by tormented sleepers. The air was invariably noisome from the open excrement tubs; the long bench on which we slept had no bedclothes. Through the walls we heard the endless jangling of fetters, the moaning of women, the cries of sick babies. On the walls were a mass of inscriptions, names of friends who had gone before us, news of death and insanity, and shrewd bits of advice for outwitting gendarmes. Some were freshly cut, but one worm eaten love poem looked a century old. For along this Great Siberian Road over a million men, women and children have dragged, 250,000 since 1875, people from every social class; murderers and degenerates side by side with tender girls who were exiled through the jealous wife of some petty town official.

“You keep asking me for scenes and stories. But you see we were thinking of our Dream and did not

notice so much the life outside. Did any die? Yes, one by typhoid. Our officer rushed the sufferer on at full gallop, until his delirious cries from the jolting vehicle so roused our protests that he was left in the Irkutsk prison where he died. Were there any children? Yes, one little wife had a baby ten months old, but the rest of us did all we could to help her, and the child survived the journey. Friends to say good-by? Ah, let me think. Yes—as we passed through Krasnoyarsk a student's old mother had come from a distance to see him. Our officer refused to allow the boy to kiss her. She caught but a glimpse, the gendarmes jerked him back into the vehicle and they galloped on. As I came by I saw her white haggard old face. Then she fell by the roadside.

“On reaching the Kara mines I found that the prison year was but eight months, and that my forty months in prison had been taken from my forty-eight month sentence. So having stayed ten months, I left Kara—as I then hoped—forever. I was taken to Barguzin, a bleak little group of huts near the Arctic Circle. We arrived in February, 45 degrees below zero. I began to look for work. Seeing a few forlorn little children I proposed a school. The police agent forbade me, and showed his police rules from St. Petersburg, which forbid an exiled doctor to heal the sick or an exiled minister to comfort the dying. No educated person may use his powers to improve his hamlet. (Many politicians have hired

out as laborers to the Cossacks at five cents a day.) Here were three young students, 'administrative' exiles, exiled for life without a trial because suspected by some gendarme or spy. We decided to escape, and searched two years for a guide to lead us a thousand miles to the Pacific. We found a bent old peasant who had made the journey years before. With him we set out one night, leading four pack horses. We soon found the old man useless. We had maps and a compass, but these did little good in the Taiga, that region of forest crags and steep ravines where we walked now toward heaven and now to the region below. Often I watched my poor stupid beast go rolling and snorting down a ravine, hoping as he passed each tree that the next would stop his fall. Then for hours we would use all our arts and energies to drag and coax him up. It was beautiful weather by day but bitterly cold by night. We had hard-tack to eat, also pressed tea and a little tobacco. So we walked and climbed about 600 miles; in a straight line perhaps 200.

"Meanwhile the police had searched in vain. The Governor had telegraphed to St. Petersburg, and from there the command had come that we be found at any cost. The plan adopted was characteristic of the System. Fifty neighboring farmers were seized (in harvest time) and were exiled from farms and families until they brought us back. After weeks of search they found us in the Apple Mountains. Their leader shouted across the ravine that

unless we gave in they must keep on our trail and escape was impossible. As we went back, around each of us rode ten armed men.

“The three students were sent in different directions up into the worst of the Arctic wilderness—Yakutsk. Here each slept in a little ‘yurt’ (mud hut) with wild Mongolians and their cattle, sealed in winter, stifling, lined thick with rotting straw, rags and animal filth. If the exile walked out to breathe, the watchful natives dragged him back. To such yurts two young girl friends of mine, Rosa Frank and Vera Sheftel, students from the medical college in St. Petersburg, were sent each alone and spent years without a word from civilized people. In such places even men have gone insane. But I leave my story. Of the three students one is dead, another is dying of consumption, and the third escaped, returned to the old struggle in Russia, was caught and given eight years as a hard-labor convict, and having again escaped, is to-day renewing the struggle.

“As punishment for my attempt I was sentenced to four years hard labor in Kara and to forty blows of the lash. Into my cell a physician came to see if I were strong enough to live through the agony. I saw at once that, afraid to flog a woman political without precedent, by this trick of declaring me too sick to be punished they wished to establish the precedent of the sentence in order that others might be flogged in the future. I insisted that I was strong enough, and that the court had no right to record

such a sentence unless they flogged me at once. The sentence was not carried out.

“Back in Kara I rejoiced to meet seventeen women politicals, with whom I lived in four low cells. Here we had books and writing materials and were quite comfortable, discussing the future struggle for Russia's freedom.

“A few weeks later eight of the men politicals escaped in pairs, leaving dummies in their places. As the guards never took more than a hasty look into that noisome cell, they did not discover the ruse for weeks. Then mounted Cossacks rode out. The man hunt spread. Some of the fugitives struggled through jungles, over mountains and through swamps a thousand miles to Vladivostok, saw the longed-for American vessels, and there on the docks were re-captured. All were brought back to Kara.

“For this we were all punished. One morning the Cossack guards entered our cells, seized us, tore off our clothes, and dressed us in convict suits alive with vermin. That scene cannot be described. One of us attempted suicide. Taken to an old prison we were thrown into the ‘black holes’—foul little stalls off a low grimy hall which contained two big stoves and two little windows. Each of us had a stall 6 feet by 5. On winter nights the stall doors were left open for heat, but in summer each was locked at night in her own black hole. For three months we did not use our bunks but fought with candles and pails of scalding water, until at last the vermin were all

killed. We had been put on the 'black hole diet' of black bread and water. For three years we never breathed the outside air. We struggled constantly against the outrages inflicted on us. After one outrage we lay like a row of dead women for nine days without touching food, until certain promises were finally exacted from the warden. This 'hunger strike' was used repeatedly. To thwart it we were often bound hand and foot while Cossacks tried to force food down our throats.

"Kara grew worse after I left. To hint at what happened I tell briefly the story of my dear friend Maria, a woman of broad education and deep refinement. Shortly after my going, Maria saw Madame Sigida strike an official who had repeatedly insulted the women. Two days later she watched Sigida die, moaning and bleeding from the lash; that night she saw three women commit suicide as a protest to the world; she knew that twenty men attempted suicide on the night following, and she determined to double the protest by assassinating the Governor of Trans-Baikal, who had ordered Sigida's flogging. At this time Maria was pregnant. Her prison term over, she left her husband and walked hundreds of miles to the Governor's house and shot him. She spent three months in a cold, dirty, 'secret cell' not long enough to lie down in or high enough to stand up in, wearing the cast-off suit of a convict, sleeping on the bare floor and tormented by vermin, she was then sentenced to be hanged. She hesitated now whether

to save the life of her unborn child. She knew that if she revealed her condition her sentence would be changed to imprisonment. She decided to keep silent and sacrifice her child, that when the execution was over and her condition was discovered, the effect on Russia might be still greater. Her condition, however, became apparent, and she was started off to the Irkutsk prison. It was midwinter, 40 below zero. She walked. She was given no overcoat and no boots, until some common criminals in the column gave her theirs. Her child was born dead in prison and soon after she too died.

“Meanwhile I had been taken to Selenzgiensk, a little Buriat hamlet on the frontier of China where Mr. Kennan met me.”

Kennan speaks of her in these words: “Her face bore traces of much suffering, and her thick, dark wavy hair, cut short in prison at the mines, was streaked here and there with gray. But not hardship nor exile, nor penal servitude had been able to break her brave, finely tempered spirit, or to shake her convictions of honor or duty. * * * * There was not another educated woman within a hundred miles; she was separated for life from family and friends, and she had, it seemed to me, nothing to look forward to except a few years more or less of hardship and privation, and at last burial in a lonely graveyard beside the Selenga River. * * * * The unshaken courage with which this unfortunate woman contemplated her dreary future, and the

faith she manifested in the ultimate triumph of liberty in her native country were as touching as they were heroic. Almost the last words she said to me were, 'Mr. Kennan, we may die in exile and our children may die in exile, and our children's children may die in exile, but something must come of it at last!'

"The seven years that followed," she continued, "were the hardest of the twenty-three, for I spoke to but a few politicals who stopped there several weeks. In winter—from twenty to fifty below zero—I used to put my chair up on the brick stove and sit with my head close to the thatch." Hence the severe rheumatism that now affects her. "The Government had allowed me \$6 a month. My hut rent was 50 cents, wood \$1.50, food \$4.00. My friends at home? Yes, they sent money too, but of course I sent this to my Kara friends. At long intervals one of their many letters reached me—sometimes sewed in the lining of a Buriat cap. I grew almost frantic with loneliness, and to keep my sanity I would run out on the snow shouting passionate orations, or even playing the prima donna, and singing grand opera arias to the bleak landscape, which never applauded.

"The seven years over, I was allowed to travel all through Siberia. I lived three years in Irkutsk, the main Siberian city, and many years besides in Tobolsk, Tiumen, and other smaller towns. Here as my hardship ended I saw the sufferings of others begin. By the increasing procession from Russia I

knew that our work was spreading. With hundreds of comrades I planned future work. In September, 1896, thoroughly 'reformed,' I secured permission to return to Russia, and three hours later I was on the train.

"Our old 'People's Party' had become the 'Party of the Will of the People,' and had died as thousands of its leaders were sent to exile or prison. In 1887 the Social Democratic Party was formed, working mainly in the factories and mills. Here they found ready listeners, for the laborers, who had formed unions to mitigate their wretched existence, were often lashed to death. It was against the law to strike. Once when a labor leader had been arrested and a committee from the workers came to the prison to ask his release, they were shot down by the prison officials. Several times men were shot for parading on the First of May. Among the workers the new party gained strength until about 1900. Then all its Jewish members seceded and formed the "Bund," which favors immediate revolution. Others too have seceded.

"The Social Revolutionist Party, of which I am a member, began only five years ago, but it is already the most promising party in the growing struggle for freedom. Like the Social Democrats we strive for the Socialist commonwealth. But unlike them, we believe that to secure our freedom, the first step is to throw off the System of the Czar. To this standard—Freedom by Revolution—members from

all parties rally. The Liberalist Miloshevski served for years on the Board of Alderman and the Board of Education in his city, striving to lift the people out of the dense ignorance which made them slaves. For years he struggled to make the school education of real value. Constantly thwarted by the Government, as I myself had been, he was at last driven to our party, became a valuable worker, was captured and is to-night at the silver mines of Nertchinsk, to which the Kara prisoners have been transferred. Through our secret reports we know that this place is even more loathsome than Kara.

“Like Miloshevski, men of middle age, Liberals for twenty years, have seen their newspapers and magazines garbled to death by the censors, their friends exiled without trial, on the most absurd suspicions, and so at last they see that whatever be their creed, first of all they must sweep away the System.

“To the peasant we teach the old lesson. To reach freedom, first—the land must be owned by the people, second—the System of the Czar must be swept away. There is not a province in Russia where our literature does not go. The underground mails run smoothly now. Scores of presses work ceaselessly in Switzerland, safe from capture. Not to take useless risks, our central committee is scattered all through Russia; it seldom meets, but it constantly plans through cipher letters and directs the provincial committees, which in turn guide the small local committees, and so down to the little

peasant and laborer groups that meet to-night by thousands in huts and city tenements.

"These thousands of groups draw swiftly closer. Proclamations, open letters, and announcements pour through the underground mail. Our leaders constantly travel from group to group. As a leader my story is typical. When on reaching Russia eight years ago I began again to travel I noticed at once a vast difference. I no longer walked, but had money for the railroads and so covered ten times the ground; for six years the railway compartment was my home. I had meetings on river boats by night, in city tenements rooms, in peasant huts, and in the forests; but unlike the old times, the way had always been prepared by some one before me. I was constantly protected. Once in Odessa the police came into the house where I was staying. Their suspicions had been aroused and they made a search. I at once became an old peasant woman."

In a twinkling she had changed. Her shawl had come up over her head, her hands were clasped in her lap, her head nodded. A bent, decrepit old peasant looked from under the shawl with a vacant grin.

"My ruse succeeded. The next month, far down in the South, I was living as a French woman. On some rumor the police came along, examining passports in every house on the block. I slipped out while they searched the next house, and entered it just as they came to the house where I had stayed. Again, only eighteen months ago, I was in Keif with

a young girl of seventeen, an active worker, who had been suspected and was under police surveillance. We slept together in her tiny tenement room. I had been there a week, when the spies watching her window observed me with her. The next night suddenly a gendarme knocked and said, 'There is someone sleeping with you, why have you not announced it to the police?' Fortunately I was out at the time. She being so young was very frightened, but managed to reply, 'Only my grandmother who has come to see me.' The moment he had gone she slipped out into the rain and found me at a secret meeting. There they dressed me in silks as a grand lady and I drove to the railway station in style. I doubt if the police can ever arrest me again.

"Besides these constant communications from group to group by leaders and by printed works, we believe at times in demonstrations; for the excitement that comes with the sudden burst of speeches and enthusiasm, the arrests that follow and the new victims started to Siberia—these help further to arouse the dull peasants and workmen.

"Some believe in the effectuality or terror. In 1901 the Fighting League was organized. Its only business is terror. It has few active members, all strictly secret; none of us know their names. A long list of candidates eagerly wait to carry on the work. They have killed a dozen officials in the last three years. De Pléhve when Chief of Police in 1881 started outrages against the Jews, and recently as

Minister of the Interior he caused the Kishineff Massacre, wishing to set the peasants at each others throats and so keep them down. For the same purpose he revived the use of the knout to lash men and women. It is men like him who are picked out to be assassinated.

“Few believe in assassination. Revolution by the whole people is our one object, and for this the time is near. The Japanese War has caused the deepest bitterness ever felt in Russia; to the 664,000 lives lost in a century of useless wars, now over a hundred thousand will be added; and every hamlet will mourn its dead. Then will our 400,000 workers call on the millions around them to rise for freedom. Arms? There are plenty. Why in recent riots have soldiers refused to fire on the crowd? Because all through the army are soldiers and even officers working secretly for the cause. Arms—yes and brains—for in the universities and in every profession are wise, resolute men to guide the wild passions of revolt. In the zemstvos are hundreds of officials straining to hasten our struggle. So in this last year the movement has suddenly swelled. Already four hundred thousand strong! Day and night they work. In place of sleep and food and drink—the dream of freedom! Freedom to think and speak! Freedom to work! Justice to all! For this cause I shall travel three months in your free country. For this cause I have the honor of making to free Americans our appeal.”

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